

Counting the Costs: Examining Financial and Psychological Challenges in Cancer Care and Strategies for Mitigation

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This article explores the relationships among cancer care, financial challenges, and mental health, emphasizing the growing significance of addressing these interconnected issues. Increased frequency of cancer diagnoses and improved treatment options have resulted in higher survival rates, highlighting emerging challenges. Disparities exist among specific populations, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. Current interventions and policy strategies highlight gaps in addressing financial toxicity and health-related quality of life. Future research should include developing tailored interventions and policies that consider the complex interplay among cancer care, financial challenges, and mental health.

AT A GLANCE

- Increased survival rates have led to emerging economic challenges and mental health considerations in cancer care.
- Out-of-pocket costs have a significant impact on treatment decisions and quality of life, particularly for cancer survivors facing financial strain and psychological distress.
- Patients in rural areas and young adults experience heightened financial toxicity and mental health challenges.

KEYWORDS

mental health; quality of life; cancer care; financial challenges; out-of-pocket costs

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Cancer's far-reaching economic impact on individuals and their families has emerged as a global challenge, requiring a comprehensive exploration of its multifaceted dimensions (Alzehr et al., 2022). The heightened frequency of cancer diagnoses in the United States is a testament to advancements in early detection and evolving treatment modalities, contributing to a dynamic landscape of cancer care (Khan et al., 2023). According to the American Cancer Society (2019), the number of cancer survivors is projected to exceed 22.1 million by January 1, 2030, solely because of population growth and aging. Although these advancements have improved survivorship rates, the financial burdens associated with cancer diagnosis and treatment, combined with challenges in health-related quality of life (HRQOL) and mental health, are felt among patients, their families, and their caregivers, and across the broader healthcare system. An in-depth analysis of these complex issues is necessary to address their intricate relationships (Alzehr et al., 2022; Park & Look, 2018; Zahnd et al., 2019).

This article seeks to explore the economic and psychological challenges intertwined with cancer care, focusing on the intricacies associated with patient out-of-pocket costs (OOPCs) and the overall impact of cancer treatment on mental health and HRQOL. By shedding light on the potential challenges that may emerge during shared treatment decision-making, particularly when discussing financial burdens, the aim is to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the economic and psychosocial landscape of cancer and to connect patients and survivors with available resources to alleviate hardships.

Economic Challenges in Cancer Care

The economic challenges intertwined with cancer care extend beyond the clinical aspects, permeating the financial fabric of individuals and the broader healthcare system. The rising prevalence of cancer, fueled by early detection and evolving treatment modalities, has led to an increasing number of survivors. Although increased survivorship is a testament to progress, it has led to a new set of challenges associated with long-term care, survivorship programs, and the overall financial impact on individuals and the healthcare system.